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SUBJECT: DAS GRAFFY MEETS WITH GREEK PARLIAMENTARIANS ON  
ENVIRONMENT

REF: ATHENS 01411

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On October 8, Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for Public Diplomacy for Europe and EurAsia Colleen Graffy met with several Members of Parliament (MP) from the Greek Special Standing Committee on Protection of the Environment. The discussion focused largely on managing carbon emissions for the major economies, utilizing advanced technologies for waste and water management in Greece, and regional energy security issues. DAS Graffy emphasized key USG programs on climate change and green diplomacy. End Summary.

MPs from Environment Highlight Concerns on  
Climate Change, Waste and Water Management  
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¶2. (SBU) In an October 8 meeting with Greek MPs from the Environment Committee, DAS Colleen Graffy said the U.S. is listening to the conversation in Europe on environment and looking to change the perception that the U.S. is not engaged on climate change, where it has already committed USD 37 billion. The U.S. leads the major economies and is working towards a tenable forward-looking solutions post-Kyoto. DAS Graffy highlighted the State Department's "green diplomacy" campaign to partner with citizens and the innovative "League of Green Embassies," to instill a carbon-neutral footprint, by applying recycling, energy conservation & efficiency, and using renewable energy sources, for member Embassies. (Note: Athens joined the League of Green Embassies in April 2008. End Note.) She added that the U.S. was also encouraging green industries and the creation of green-collar jobs to be developed alongside second-generation technologies in biofuels and renewable energies.

¶3. (SBU) MP Dimitris Varvarigos, Deputy Chairman of the Environmental Committee and the ranking member of the committee from the major opposition PASOK party, criticized the U.S. stance regarding the Kyoto Protocol and said the size of the U.S. economy put it in a unique place to take a leadership role on climate change. Greece is a very small country with a smaller level of emissions relative to other countries, he maintained, and our compliance with the Kyoto Protocol is more symbolic than substantive. "If we are not trying to meet our obligations to reduce carbon emissions, than we cannot ask others to do the same." MP Michalis Papagiannakis from the left coalition said cooperation on environmental issues was necessary, as we all had "the same boat and the same fortune." Finally, in a rare appearance by a member of the Communist Party (KKE - which remains a Stalinist party) in a meeting with a U.S. official, MP Nikos Gantzis said that if U.S. policies on the environment were presented as was done by DAS Graffy, his party "would have no problems" with the U.S.

14. (SBU) The head of the Environmental Committee MP Kyriakos Mitsotakis, son of the former Greek Prime Minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis, said the US can improve its image by contributing to Europe's efforts and supporting the UN framework to hammer out the post Kyoto Protocol. He commented that Greece has "just about met" the Kyoto protocol requirements. (Note: However, it appears that Greece has not complied - see reftel.) As for Greece's energy concerns, he remarked that the interest in renewables was very high given Greece's supply of wind and sun, but it still had a long way to go. Waste management was a pressing issue, he said, as Greece still relied on landfills and needed to explore alternatives for incineration. On water, parts of the country have water shortages, an issue of key importance to the farmers. Mitsotakis welcomed any exchange of information with the U.S., speakers, video-conferences, and especially contacts with the EPA to address these pressing issues.

MP from Foreign Affairs and Defense Discusses  
Regional Energy Security and Assistance  
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15. (SBU) MP Militiadis Varvitsiotis, President of the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defense, keyed in on Greece's new energy agenda which has resulted in strategic partnerships, including with Russia. He emphasized that this strategy was being implemented by all European countries. Projects such as the Burgas-Alexandroupoli oil pipeline, were being considered. DAS Graffy encouraged Varvitsiotis to consider that Russian's recent invasion of Georgia demonstrated that you cannot simply go

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"sleep-walking" into reliance on Russia's energy resources.

16. (SBU) On Georgia, DAS Graffy expressed appreciation for the Government of Greece's (GoG) assistance to Georgia. Varvitsiotis noted that he would be traveling with other European representatives to South Ossetia and Abkhazia on a fact-finding mission for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Western European Union (WEU). He said the mission would not focus on who is at fault, but on how to safe-guard Georgian integrity. When asked about Greece's upcoming chairmanship of the OSCE in 2009, Varvitsiotis remarked that the GoG was examining its priorities.

17. (SBU) Regarding Cyprus, he believed that it was turning a new page given the election of Christofias and renewed negotiations, but he said Greece had been dissatisfied with the slow pace of the Joint Committees. Varvitsiotis said the GoG would never accept a confederation proposal, but one country with two separate communities. As for Afghanistan, his recent April visit with other members of the Defense and Foreign Affairs committee to visit Greek troops had helped to publicize the challenges in Afghanistan and Greek contributions to the effort. Varvitsiotis said that the GOG continues to consider how it might further assist in Afghanistan. He also agreed that the GOG could potentially provide greater financial support to Afghanistan. On the issue of helicopters, he was aware of repeated requests, but he had concerns that the GoG was utilizing older models and that the new ones were needed to provide emergency supplies during critical times to remote islands.

MP from Opposition Party Urges Collaboration  
to Address Waste Management and Water Issues  
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18. (SBU) MP Spyros Kouvelis from the PASOK party briefed DAS Graffy on the problems with waste management, the lack of land-planning, and the environmental challenges facing the agriculture sector. (Note: Kouvelis is Post's FY-09 IVP candidate and is the former Head of World Wildlife Fund in Greece. End Note.) In particular, he cited that 85 percent of water in Greece goes towards agriculture of which 40

percent is wasted. Kouvelis also added that advanced technologies could help Greece look for solutions on climate change and waste management. Even looking at best practices from USG agencies and the private sector would help Greece improve its policy structure on environment and urban land planning, he commented. He stressed that Greece is one of the largest waste-producers in Europe. He welcomed the opportunity to meet with environmentalists from the U.S. as well as government agencies such as the EPA, which could share ideas on the inter-play between agency, industry, and the community.

Comment

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19. (SBU) In all of the meetings with DAS Graffy, the MPs cited waste management and climate change as two of their top concerns. The recent pile-up of trash in March and Greece's disappointing performance in measuring carbon emissions (reftel) per the Kyoto Protocol are indicative of the challenges ahead. We have seen little done by the GoG to attract the private sector to provide advanced technologies on waste management or invest in the renewable energy sector.

During DAS Graffy's visit, the GoG was receptive to information exchanges, speakers, and videoconferences on best practices in the areas cited, as well as eco-tourism and green buildings, and we intend to follow-up on these opportunities. End Comment.

SPECKHARD